

## Testimony in Support of Restoring Full Funding for Centers for Independent Living

My name is Joe Eckert, I'm a life-long resident of the Town of Stratford and a person with both a physical and mental health disability. I am also the Operations Director at Access Independence, one of the five Centers for Independent Living that provide vital supports and services to people with disabilities as well as their family, friends, and other service providers.

As the Operations Director of a Center for Independent Living I have witnessed the State year after year require State agencies to reduce their budgets in order to resolve the financial crisis the State is facing. However, year after year our Designated State Unit, the Department of Rehabilitation Services, has refused to reduce their budget, and instead has moved to reduce the budget of the Centers for Independent Living. Unlike the State agency, however, **the Centers for Independent Living provide a monumental return on investment, saving the State OVER TEN MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR for an investment of only \$530,000** by transitioning individuals from nursing facilities to the community, assisting individuals with disabilities to return to work and overcome their dependence on State-funded disability benefits, and reducing the utilization of costly State agency services by connecting individuals with resources within the community. Year after year, the State Legislature has seen through this farce and has restored funding for Centers for Independent Living in the State budget, however this past year they did not, and the Centers suffered a 60% cut to our State funding. With this reduction in funding, the Centers for Independent Living can no longer continue to provide the vital services and supports to individuals across the State, and instead are forced to turn people away who need our help. These individuals are left to depend on the State agencies for services, services which are substantially more costly when delivered by State agencies instead of by the nonprofit Centers for Independent Living. This reduction of funding only saved the State approximately \$290,000, however it is costing the State substantially more by reducing the return on investment we are able to provide with the funding that remains and causing an increase in utilization of costly State agency services.

A reduction in funding to the State agencies supporting people with disabilities is unfortunate, but to allow these agencies to skirt this reduction by instead reducing the budgets of nonprofit organizations that are a sound financial investment is irresponsible and shortsighted, and further harms the financial situation of the State. **Every year the Centers for Independent Living save the State more money than is invested in them, providing almost twenty times the return on investment annually.** Please restore full funding for Centers for Independent Living and force the State agencies to follow directives to reduce their own budgets and not the budgets of organizations that are having a positive impact on the State's financial situation. If you truly care about resolving the State's financial crisis, consider increasing the budget for Centers for Independent Living and outsourcing expensive State services to the more efficient Centers for Independent Living – we save the State over ten million dollars a year for an investment of only \$530,000, **imagine what our organizations could save the State with a more significant investment!**

While I have focused here on finances we are talking about people. People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable populations in the State, and morally we have an obligation to provide these individuals the same opportunities as those without disabilities. By reducing funding for Centers for Independent Living many individuals are left unable to connect with supports and services they need in order to lead happy, productive lives, and instead are left dependent on costly State social services that allow them to maintain at the lowest level, but never to better their lives or pursue their aspirations. Please do the right thing both morally and financially and fully restore the funding taken from Centers for Independent Living in the previous year, and instead of reducing funding consider investing in the State's financial health by increasing funding to our organizations which have proven to provide such a high return on investment.